

## Twin Cities mayors make a Minnesota pitch to press

By **CONRAD WILSON**, Star Tribune

May 28, 2008

WASHINGTON - The elephants are coming, and they're looking for something to do.

Lest the thousands of GOP conventioners cloister themselves in the Xcel Energy Center at this summer's Republican National Convention, the event's hosts are pitching the region as a place to bust out.

"Middle of the country, but hardly middle of the road," says a convention brochure distributed in Washington on Wednesday by St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman and Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak.

Among the dominant images on the brochure: elephants canoeing across Lake Calhoun, elephants outside the Guthrie, elephants in the skyways, elephants everywhere. The elephant is the symbol of the Republican Party.

Coupled with the brochure was a hefty tin of Minnesota swag: Hell's Kitchen Homemade Peanut Butter, a Minnesota Orchestra CD and Lake Wobegon mints, to name a few.

Rybak called the GOP convention a "great coming out party" for the Twin Cities. "We are the best-kept secret that will no longer be so secret after this convention," he said.

While Wednesday's event at the National Press Club was geared toward drumming up interest and educating the national media, leaders also expressed hope that the convention will provide both immediate economic and long-term benefits.

Coleman said the lasting impact on the community will be significant as it is the largest event the Twin Cities has ever undertaken.

For some members of the national press, it was a hard sell, not unlike a timeshare pitch at the end of a Hawaiian vacation.

"Where's our hot dish?" one reporter shouted. "Our bars?"

Cynthia Leshner, president of the Minneapolis St. Paul 2008 Host Committee, assured the media: "You've got to come and get them, but they'll be ready."

She added: "We're going to be Minnesota nice at its best." Conrad Wilson 202-408-2723

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